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AUTHOR Boatright, Joyce; Lestarjette, Steve
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ABSTRACT

In response to a statewide economic crisis resulting in a 9% funding cut for Texas community colleges, the presidents of nine Houston area community colleges formed a consortium to pool their resources and aggressively market the colleges. Since 1986, the Gulf Coast Consortium has mounted late-summer television and radio advertising campaigns to raise the image of the community colleges and hence public interest in individual institutions, and to increase awareness of community colleges as a viable alternative to higher-priced senior institutions. The advertising campaigns, which target the traditional student age group and women re-entering the workforce, are designed to dispel the negative perceptions held by area adults about the prestige, educational quality, and student caliber of the community colleges, while underscoring the benefits of a community college education. The consortium's first campaign resulted in a gain of more than 473,000 contact hours, for a minimal investment of $150,000. A revised campaign the following year delivered another 3.5% increase in contact hours. Rather than utilize the services of an advertising agency as in previous years, the 1988 campaign is being researched, written, produced, and placed on the air by in-house professionals at a great reduction in cost. (UCM)

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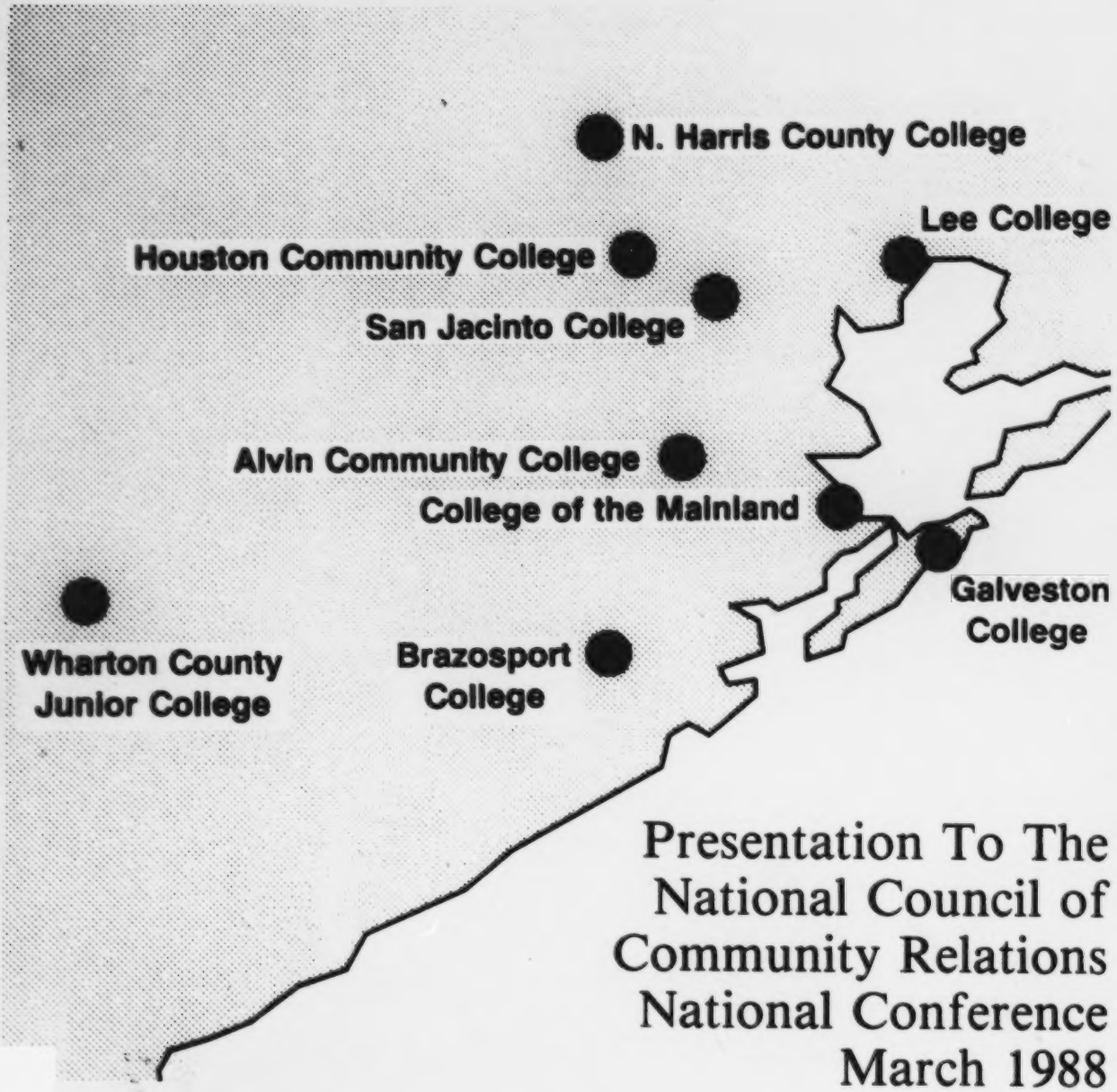


## Presentation To The National Council of Community Relations National Conference March 1988

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# Who We Are

## *The Gulf Coast Consortium*

Nine independent community colleges
along the upper Texas Gulf Coast.

| | **Students** |
|---|---|
| Houston Community College | 22,000 |
| San Jacinto College | 17,000 |
| North Harris County Community College | 12,000 |
| Lee College | 5,000 |
| Alvin Community College | 4,500 |
| Brazosport College | 3,500 |
| College of the Mainland | 3,500 |
| Wharton County Junior College | 2,500 |
| Galveston College | 2,000 |
| **TOTAL** | **72,000** |

Last year, these colleges enrolled **30%** of all Texas community college students and received 25% of the state's appropriations for community colleges.

While the state's community college enrollment has grown 254% since 1968, enrollment in Consortium Colleges has grown **1137%** to more than **72,000** students in credit courses today.

# HOUSTON-AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGES REAP REWARDS OF COOPERATIVE TELEVISION CAMPAIGN

Dr. Joyce Boatright
Community Relations Director,
The Houston Community College System

Steve Lestarjette
Communications Director,
The San Jacinto College District

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Nine Houston area community colleges are preparing for a late summer television and radio advertising campaign, following similar, successful campaigns of the past two years.

From mid-July through mid-August, Houston-area television viewers will catch the message that community colleges have been the first step toward success for hundreds of Texas Gulf Coast residents in a variety of dynamic and challenging career fields.

And, while television campaigns for local colleges are rare but not new, this mutual advertising project represents one of the first consortium efforts among separate community college districts in the country, a trend that is gathering momentum.

At its heart are two critical principles affirmed by presidents and public relations directors of the Consortium's nine colleges: that raising the image of all community colleges will increase public interest in individual community colleges; and that aggressive advertising, despite legislative budget cuts to education, will increase awarenes of community colleges as a viable alternative to higher-priced Texas senior institutions.

Two years ago, the Consortium's first television and radio campaign delivered gratifying results. With no other change in the advertising and promotional mix, participating colleges gained more than 473,000 contact hours, a 4.5 percent increase, for a minimal investment of $150,000. A revised campaign the following year delivered another 3.5 percent increase in contact hour. Consortium members anticipate even bigger results this year.

## A Window of Opportunity

This giant step toward image building and marketing actually began in the hard-luck summer of 1985, when the Texas economy, prompted by plunging oil prices, hit the skids toward double digit unemployment. In 1983, 88 percent of all companies in the greater Houston area were oil and gas related; by 1986, the count had fallen to 73 percent.

Dismal tax collections forced the Texas legislature to cut funding to the state's 49 community college districts by nine percent, and local economic troubles forced many colleges to slash budgets even

deeper.

But while most institutions were aborting programs and closing facilities, the area's nine community colleges saw a window of opportunity.

Since early 1983, presidents from Alvin Community College, Brazosport College, College of the Mainland, Galveston College, Houston Community College System, Lee College, North Harris County College District, The San Jacinto College District and Wharton County Junior College had met to discuss mutual concerns and projects. The initial focus of this "Gulf Coast Consortium" was to strengthen business-industry-community linkages, but with unraveling economic fortunes, presidents saw the advantage of pooling resources to aggressively market their colleges as desirable options to distant and costly state universities.

## Strategies for Success

From a recommendation of the Consortium's nine public relations directors, the presidents agreed to develop a strong television/radio campaign targeted for "traditional age" students (men and women ages 17-24 years) and women re-entering the workforce (ages 25-35).

Before any research or creative was initiated, each member college contributed its assigned portion of the $150,000 advertising budget to a single account maintained by the largest Consortium member. Contributions were figured on each school's percentage of total state appropriations to Consortium schools, a formula which allowed larger colleges (which would reap the lion's share of results from the campaign) to pay the lion's share of the budget. Consequently, Houston Community College, which received 32.5 percent of all state appropriations to Consortium colleges, paid the identical percentage of the advertising budget. Galveston College, the smallest member, paid the least.

With objectives understood and funds in place, the public relations directors of each member college then worked to make Consortium television and radio advertising a reality. Directors appointed a project director and a subcommittee to handle details and bring recommendations to the larger group.

Within weeks, the subcommittee had interviewed numerous advertising agencies and selected one agency to propose the creative concept, test the campaign and place the media buy. The subcommittee worked closely with the agency to supply research information, creative direction and overall project supervision. Subcommittee members also negotiated important solutions to concerns from the entire public relations group and presidents' committee, and followed through with those decisions with the agency.

Cooperative Television Campaign
Reaps Results

## Results of Research

Using primary and secondary information sources, the Consortium identified three major trends which shaped the direction of the overall campaign:

* The recent downswing in the 18-24 age segment of the nation's population has left most of the United States with an overabundance of two- and four-year colleges.

* Colleges today are competing to win the registration of these younger students as never before, while competing for larger shares of the 25-35 age segment, which is attending college in increasing numbers.

* Competition between two- and four-year colleges is growing in intensity as colleges grapple with a decreasing student "pool" while prospective students realize expanding college options.

Digging deeper, the Consortium interviewed representatives from each targeted group. In-depth conversations discovered that both high school students and mature adults likely to enroll in college had misconceptions of the quality of education at two-year community or junior colleges.

More specifically, the Consortium found that two-year colleges were not viewed as "prestigious" institutions; that the quality of education at two-year colleges was perceived as "less" than instruction at a four-year school; that the caliber of students at two-year colleges was not "as high" as those attending senior institutions.

Analyzing further, the Consortium adopted a creative strategy designed to dispel these negative perceptions while underscoring the benefits of a community college education. Working with the Consortium subcommittee, these broad statements were identified for specific attention in the 30-second television spot:

* Community college teaching staffs are composed of degreed faculty. Students are not taught by other students (graduate assistants), as is common at state universities.

* Teacher-to-student ratio at community colleges is about 1:20, meaning smaller classes for more student participation and instructor interaction.

* Public community colleges are far more cost effective than their four-year counterparts while offering the same basic curriculum for freshman and sophomore students.

* Attending a community college provides the convenience of living close to home.

Further, research uncovered another primary concern of college-bound men and women: the security of knowing they had selected a school which could best prepare them for a career in their chosen field. Younger interviewees voiced the concern: "Will I be successful? Where can I get the best training?"

Likewise, more mature interviewees expressed their apprehension about re-entering the college scene after many years and competing for grades with younger students.

Both target segments agreed they were unmoved at the mention of famous community college alumni such as O.J. Simpson, Victoria Principal, Nick Nolte, Kenny Rogers, Dustin Hoffman and others. Younger interviewees felt the success of such personalities was attributed to personal talents, and similar success for them was unrealistic. Older representatives were even less impressed, indicating they thought of entertainers as those having very little education.

Still, research showed that those interviewed were motivated by the success stories of successful alumni in "normal" or obtainable careers such as banking, business, nursing and others. Public relations directors of the nine Consortium colleges began looking for success models among their own alumni pools.

## Implementing the Plan

Using the research as a guide, the agency wrote a script which dispelled negative perceptions about community colleges while offering Gulf Coast area schools as desirable options to high-cost senior institutions.

The initial spot also included a toll free telephone number to a professional marketing company. While telephone responses were not the gauge of the campaign's success, Consortium public relations directors wished to capture the names and addresses of prospective students strongly motivated by the campaign. Hiring the independent marketing company allowed the Consortium to capture telephone responses which were expected from several area codes at various times of the day and night.

Consortium members selected one member college to gather daily all responses from the telephone marketing company, then distribute the entire list to each member college by computer telephone modum. Members agreed to follow-up on those prospects living within their specific service areas.

More than 150 prospective students dialed the toll-free number during the course of the advertising campaign. Numerous other

respondents called directly to their local community colleges. Consortium colleges found it impossible to determine the exact number of calls to their local telephone numbers, but all reported an increased number of information calls during the campaign.

After reviewing the creative proposal, the produced commercials for radio and television, the media buy, and the computer telephone modum distribution system, public relations directors recommended the project to the presidents' committee. Many president's reviewed the project with their regents, until the project received a broad consensus of support.

## The Fruits of Cooperation

Fall enrollment figures from the nine-member Consortium colleges showed increases ranging from two to twelve percent. One college reported a headcount gain of 1,766 students. The most impressive increase, of course, was the gain of 473,000 contact hours which showed a significant increase in full-time equivalencies.

Largest increases came in those "traditional student" age groups and women 25-35 which were targeted by the campaign.

More than a week after the radio and television spots had ended, during the first week of classes following registration, each participating college surveyed all students in first-semester English and Data Processing classes, courses which usually draw first-time students. The survey was identical for all colleges and was intended to provide revealing information about the effect of the campaign on enrollment results.

More than 7,920 students completed the survey. More than 77 percent of those students returning surveys were classified in the two primary audiences targeted by the campaign. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were new students. When asked, "In the past few months, do you recall having seen a TV commercial about two-year, community or junior colleges?" a phenomenal 49 percent answered yes.

This remarkably high recall rate (a 20-percent rate for television is considered outstanding) was attributed to the strength and creativeness of the commercial itself. The radio commercial also received strong endorsement (a 31-percent recall rate).

College presidents agreed that increasing enrollments and the corresponding increase in tuition and state appropriations could be directly correlated to the strong advertising campaign which turned Texas economic misery into an advantage for Houston-area community colleges.

Cooperative Television Campaign
Reaps Results

## Onward to the Future

One success has bred others. The nine Gulf Coast Consortium colleges have undertaken regional advertising in national magazines, have shared creative talent for publications designed to tell their story to the Texas Legislature and other important publics. The list of successes continues to grow.

And so, as summer approaches, the same colleges are embarking on shared television advertising once again. This time the participants are experienced, confident, and more convinced than ever of the fruits of mutual cooperation.

Rather than utilize the services of an advertising agency, the 1988 campaign is researched, written, produced and placed on air by the Consortium's own talented professionals. Only those aspects of film production needing experienced technical assistance were contracted.

Consequently, the Consortium has saved thousands of dollars by developing its own research and surveying techniques, writing creative, producing the campaign and placing the media buy. How much has been saved? In the current year alone, the Consortium has produced five television commercials for the price of a single agency-produced spot. Adding in the savings realized by placing a media buy without an agency's commission, the Consortium's current campaign saved its member colleges more than $160,000, while better segmenting the market and increasing on-air frequency.

While the Consortium does not claim that television advertising alone has increased enrollments at its colleges, the Consortium does testify that these cooperative projects have improved community college image, and aided "top-of-mind" awareness that makes other advertising and promotional efforts more effective.

Cooperation pays. Ask any member of Texas' Gulf Coast Consortium.

# # #

1987 Television/Radio Campaign
The Gulf Coast Consortium

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For the second consecutive summer, the nine public community/junior colleges of the Gulf Coast Consortium participated in a television/radio campaign which advertised the strengths and benefits of community colleges. The campaign was aimed at "traditional" students (men and women ages 17-24) and women ages 25-35.

The objectives of the campaign were 1) to increase awareness of community and junior colleges to these target audiences; 2) to establish the Gulf Coast area's community and junior colleges as an attractive alternative to four-year colleges and universities; and 3) to substantially increase enrollment in the Gulf Coast area's community and junior colleges with effective advertising.

Fall enrollment followed the campaign. The following tables show registration figures compiled by each participating college for the past three fall registrations. Note that no cooperative advertising campaign was implemented during 1985.

| | Contact Hour Enrollment | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| District | Fall 1985 | Fall 1986 | Fall 1987 |
| Alvin Community College | 789,488 | 841,104 | 883,424 |
| Brazosport College | 621,608 | 576,328 | 560,880 |
| College of the Mainland | 518,639 | 582,349 | 584,958 |
| Galveston College | 288,192 | 314,864 | 336,992 |
| Houston Community College | 2,385,824 | 2,501,276 | 2,783,478 |
| Lee College | 682,385 | 723,787 | 798,278 |
| North Harris County College | 1,805,204 | 1,839,454 | 1,922,128 |
| San Jacinto College | 2,857,738 | 2,976,738 | 2,972,291 |
| Wharton County Jr. College | 530,206 | 596,471 | 617,378 |
| TOTALS | 10,479,284 | 10,952,371 | 11,459,807 |

According to these figures, contact hour enrollment for all Consortium colleges grew 3.5 percent over fall 1986, and has risen 8 percent since 1985. A review of enrollment demographics shows a significant increase in traditional students taking full or near-full course loads in day classes.

While it is impossible to conclude that television advertising is solely responsible for these increases, the impact of television on registration is undeniable. A recent survey of more than one thousand students of Consortium colleges showed that 60 percent recalled the Consortium's television commercial more than a week after its appearance, a phenominally high percentage for any television commercial and much higher than for advertising through any other media. Only 39 percent recalled college newspaper ads, while only 35 percent recalled television ads. More than one third (37 percent) remembered a direct mail advertisement.

These figures suggest that the Consortium has moved wisely by

including television in its advertising mix. Television strengthens credibility, visibility and awareness, thereby supporting and rendering more effective other recruiting techniques.

An In-House Success Story

Consortium members take tremendous pride in the efforts of their public relations directors to maximize advertising effectivenss while saving money. Creative, production and media buying services were handled by Consortium public relations professionals, without utilizing an advertising agency, at appreciable savings.

By serving as an in-house agency, the Consortium reduced expenses at all phases and increased funds for on-air advertising. Furthermore, we believe Consortium efforts greatly surpassed the agency for effectivness. The 1987 Advertising Survey shows a substantial increase in television recall (from 49 to 60 percent) and radio recall (from 31 to 35 percent). Increases in television recall can be attributed to increased advertising exposure and more effective media buying. Interestingly, while radio recall increased, funds allocated for radio were cut in half, certainly indicating better radio buying practices by the Consortium than the agency.

The success of the 1987 campaign points us toward further use of in-house talent in the days to come.

RESULTS OF 1987 ADVERTISING SURVEY

The Gulf Coast Consortium

| Question | 1986 | 1987 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Are you a new student enrolling for the first time, or have you enrolled in two-year, community or junior colleges before this semester? | | |
| New student | 61% | 45% |
| Returning student | 39% | 55% (N=1018) |
| 2. In the past few months, do you recall having seen a newspaper ad about two-year, community or junior colleges? | | |
| Yes | 35% | 39% |
| No | 65% | 61% (N=959) |
| 3. In the past few months, do you recall having seen a TV commercial about two-year, community or junior colleges? | | |
| Yes | 49% | 60% |
| No | 51% | 40% (N=940) |
| 4. In the past few months, do you recall having heard a radio commercial about two-year, community or junior colleges? | | |
| Yes | 31% | 35% |
| No | 69% | 65% (N=1031) |
| 5. Please indicate, from the following list, what other ways you recall having been exposed to information about two-year, community or junior colleges in the past few months? | | |
| Direct mail | 62% | 37% |
| Family/friends | 71% | 37% |
| Employer | 9% | 6% |
| Magazines | 10% | 5% |
| High school counselor | 29% | 15% (N=1725) |

7. Are you enrolled in your current class (es) primarily for personal enrichment or career-related reasons?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal enrichment | 17% | 22% | |
| Career-related reasons | 82% | 78% | (N=1017) |

8. At the completion of your current classes, will you enroll in another course at this college?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 92% | 92% | |
| No | 8% | 8% | (N=990) |

SURVEY RESULTS
1988 College Student Media Questionnaire

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. My sex is: (N=388) | 46% | Male |
| | 54% | Female |
| 2. My age is: (N=390) | 68% | Age 17-24 |
| | 21% | Age 25-34 |
| | 8% | Age 35-44 |
| | 4% | Age 45 and older |
| 3. I primarily attend classes during the: (N=369) | 84% | Day |
| | 16% | Evening |
| 4. The radio stations I listen to most often (in order of preference) are: (N=888) | 19% | KRBE |
| | 18% | KKBQ |
| | 13% | KLOL |
| | 9% | KZFX |
| | 8% | KIKK |
| | 8% | KILT |
| | 8% | KMJQ |
| | 4% | KQQK |
| | 3% | KKHT |
| | 3% | KFMK |
| | 3% | KODA |
| | 2% | KJYY |
| | 2% | KLTR |
| 5. The hours I listen to the radio most often are: (N=589) | 31% | 6-10 a.m. |
| | 13% | 10 a.m.-3 p.m. |
| | 14% | 3-7 p.m. |
| | 29% | 7 p.m.-midnight |
| | 7% | Midnight-6 a.m. |
| 6. The television programs I watch most frequently (in order of frequency) are: (N=693) | 16% | Cosby Show |
| | 6% | News |
| | 6% | Growing Pains |
| | 5% | Family Ties |
| | 5% | Moonlighting |
| | 3% | ALF |
| | 3% | All My Children |

3% Thirty Something
2% Knots Landing
2% Sports programming
2% Who's the Boss?
2% 20/20
2% L.A. Law
2% David Letterman
2% Oprah

7. The hours I watch TV most frequently are: (N=462)

6% 6 a.m.-10 a.m.
13% 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
18% 3-7 p.m.
60% 7 p.m.-midnight
4% Midnight- 6 a.m.

# Texas Community Colleges:

TODAY, more than half a million Texans are building better lives for themselves through classes at their local community college. More college freshmen and sophomores get their start at community colleges than at four-year schools around the state.

They're attending because community colleges are exciting, affordable, loaded with career options—and because community colleges are known everywhere for instruction of the highest quality.

Best of all, there's a community college near most everybody. Ninety percent of all Texans live within easy driving distance of a community college campus, making community colleges an open door to the world.

Convenient, affordable, first-rate education. For Texans from Amarillo to Brownsville, from Texarkana to El Paso, a head start—a *fresh start*—toward a meaningful career. A great state of mind for the Lone Star State.

February is Community College Month.

**Gulf Coast Area Community Colleges**

Equal Opportunity

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Where TEXANS Go To College

Member, Texas Higher Education Network

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Junior Colleges MAY 27 1988